

Chapter 3

Descriptive preliminaries

This chapter introduces descriptive units and categories that will be presupposed in the subsequent grammatical description. In §3.1 phrase structure is overviewed. In §3.2 the notions word, clitic, and affix are defined. In §3.3 word classes are defined. In §3.4 grammatical relations are defined. In §3.5 three major argument types, i.e. core, extended core, and peripheral arguments, are introduced and defined. In §3.6 three major word formation processes are described, i.e. affixation, compounding, and full reduplication.

3.1. Phrase structure

In this section I introduce two phrase types, a predicate phrase and a nominal phrase. Detailed descriptions of each phrase type are given in Chapters 4 and 7, but it is necessary to give an overview of these structures here as they are basis for the definition of certain word classes.

3.1.1. Predicate phrase

A predicate phrase falls into two types as shown in (3–1) and (3–2) below. A verbal predicate phrase consists of a verb phrase (VP) and its complement (if required).¹ A nominal predicate phrase consists of a nominal phrase (NP) and a copula verb which is only obligatory under certain conditions (which will be described in §3.1.1.2) and is left unstated elsewhere. In each type of phrase, the relative ordering of the constituents is largely fixed. In addition to the constituents specified here, there may occur a bound marker (e.g. focus marker) that may be attached to a given constituent.

- (3–1) Predicate phrase 1: verbal predicate
(VP complement+) [lexical verb (+auxiliary verb/lexical verb
2)]_{VP}
- (3–2) Predicate phrase 2: nominal predicate

¹ The notion of VP here is different from the generative notion of VP, where a verb and its complements are all within the VP domain.

NP (+copula verb)

3.1.1.1. Verbal predicate

A lexical verb is the only obligatory component, which primarily determines the argument structure of the entire predicate. Thus the minimal predicate phrase is exemplified as follows, where there is a single lexical verb *ur* ‘exist’ in the predicate phrase.

- (3–3) *pžtu=nu=du* *ur-Ø*.
 man=NOM=FOC exist-NPST
 ‘(There) is a man.’

An auxiliary verb is a verb that functions as an aspect marker or a benefactive marker (‘do for the benefit of’). As is indicated in (3–1), this slot is also filled by a verb that retains more semantic content than an auxiliary verb (e.g. ‘come’), or a second lexical verb. That is, Irabu has a serial verb construction (Chapter 7). Either type of the second verb carries finite inflection in a complex VP (whereas the (first) lexical verb in a complex VP obligatorily carries non-finite inflection). Thus in (3–4) below, the (a) example contains a simplex VP where the lexical verb *tumitar* ‘looked for’ shows finite inflection (*-tar*, past unmarked), whereas the (b) example contains a complex VP where the same lexical verb inflects for a specific non-finite verb form *tumi-i* (narrative converbal form), and the auxiliary verb *u-* (progressive) carries the finite inflectional affix *-tar* on behalf of the lexical verb. In the (c) example, the second verb slot is filled by a second lexical verb *t-* ‘come’, which, like an auxiliary, carries finite verb inflection.

- (3–4) a. *tuz=zu=du* *tumi-tar*.
 wife=ACC=FOC look.for-PST
 ‘(I) looked for a wife.’
 b. *tuz=zu* *tumi-i=du* *u-tar*.
 wife=ACC look.for-NRT=FOC PROG-PST
 ‘(I) was looking for a wife.’
 c. *tuz=zu* *tumi-i=du* *t-tar*.
 wife=ACC look.for-NRT=FOC come-PST
 ‘(I) brought a wife.’ [lit. (I) looked for a wife and came back
 (with her).]

A VP complement is required in the following three construction types:

(1) the light verb construction (as shown in (3–5) and (3–6)), where the lexical verb is filled by the light verb (*asi* ‘do’), (2) the state verb construction (3–7), where the lexical verb is filled by the state verb *ar* ‘be (in a state)’, and (3) the ‘become’ verb construction (3–8), where the lexical verb is *nar* ‘become’. In each example, the complement is a derived adverb (§3.3.6.2).

- (3–5) *kunur=ra* *taka=u=baa* *juu* *mii=du*
 these.days=TOP hawk=ACC=TOP very looking=FOC
si-Ø.
 do-NPST
 ‘These days (I) see hawks many times.’ [lit. these days I do looking at hawks.]
- (3–6) *pžtu=u* *mii+mii* *as-i+ur-Ø*.²
 man=ACC RED+looking do-THM+PROG-NPST
 ‘(He is always) staring at persons.’ [lit. He is always doing staring.]
- (3–7) *kari=a* *taka-fi=du* *ar-Ø*.
 3sg=TOP tall-AVLZ=FOC be-NPST
 ‘He is tall.’ [lit. he is in a tall state.]
- (3–8) *kari=a* *taka-fi=du* *nar-kutu*.
 3sg=TOP tall-AVLZ=FOC be-OBL
 ‘He will become tall.’ [lit. he will become in a tall state.]

3.1.1.2. Nominal predicate

A nominal predicate phrase consists of an NP as a predicate head, followed by a copula verb, which is obligatorily absent when certain conditions are met (see below).

- (3–9) a. *kari=a* *sinsii=du* *a-tar*.
 3SG=TOP teacher=FOC COP-PST
 ‘He was a teacher.’
- b. *kari=a* *sinsii*.
 3SG=TOP teacher
 ‘He is a teacher.’

The copular verb is necessary when at least one of the following conditions

² The complement of the light verb (*asi* ‘do’) is a (reduplicated) verb stem. When the complement is a reduplicated verb stem, the light verb may be the bimoraic form *asi*.